digitalconservancy
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Deposit Agreement

I represent that I am the creator of the digital material identified herein ("Work"). I represent that the Work is original and that I either own all rights of copyright or have the right to deposit the copy in a digital archive such as the Conservancy. I represent that the regard to any non-original material included in the Work I have secured written permission of the copyright owner(s) for this use or believe this use to be allowed by low. I further represent that I have included all appropriate credits and attributions. I hereby grant to the Regents of the University of Minnesota ("University"), through its University Digital conservancy, a non-exclusive right to access, reproduce and distribute the Work, in whole or in part, for the purposes of security, preservation and perpetual access. I grant the University a limited non-exclusive right to make derivative works for the purpose of migrating the Work to other media or formats in order to preserve access to the Work. I do not transfer or intend to transfer any right of copyright or other intellectual property to the University.

Work(s) to be deposited:
Title: Record Turnout: An Analysis of Moving Minneapolis Municipal Elections to Even-Numbered Years

Author's Name*:

Dylan Adams
Print

Dylan A.
Signature of Author or Authorized Representative

*(See back page for additional names and signatures if there is more than one author)

Name (please print): Dylan Adams
Address: 2500 Emerson Ave. S.
Apt. 8
Minneapolis, MN 55405

Date: 5/23/18

If the Deposit Agreement is executed by the Author's Representative, the Representative shall separately execute the following representation.

I represent that I am authorized by the Author to execute this Deposit Agreement on behalf of the Author.

Author's Representative Signature

Date: _____

Record Turnout:
An Analysis of Moving Minneapolis Municipal Elections to Even-Numbered Years

Capstone Paper

In Partial Fulfillment of the Certificate in Election Administration
The Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs
The University of Minnesota

Dylan B. Adams

May 14, 2018

May 4, 2018
Date of oral presentation

May 14, 2018
Approval date of final paper

Doug Chapin, Lecturer

Executive Summary

Many cities and local governments in the United States struggle to voter turnout to be high in municipal elections that are held in odd-numbered years. As most states and the federal government have races in even-numbered years, there are usually few high-profile draws to encourage voters cast ballots during these elections. With fewer voters making their opinions known in local races, there is a greater likelihood that local governments are not truly representative of their residents.

In Minneapolis, MN, voter turnout in the most recent municipal election was nearly thirty percentage points lower than just a year before during the presidential election of 2016. In the municipal vote, citizens tended to be older, whiter, and wealthier than the overall city population. With fewer people voting and offices that are less known, there was less engagement with local politics.

One solution to the issue of low municipal election turnout is to merge these races into an even-numbered year to coincide with state and federal ones. The rationale behind this policy choice is that greater numbers of voters participate in those general elections and would therefore be more likely to make choices for offices in their locality if they were on the same ballot.

The purpose of this report is to present what policymakers in Minneapolis might expect for turnout in local government races if it were to transition its elections to coincide with state and federal ones in even years to solve its turnout problem. Minneapolis is compared to 22 similar cities and counties based on their elections in even years and what the decrease in voter turnout is from top-of-the-ballot races for governor, senator, or president to local races such as for mayors, judges, and sheriffs. Data in the analysis comes from publicly available elections results from the websites of the comparison municipalities. Based on the analysis in this report, average drop-off in turnout is about eight percentage points, meaning that Minneapolis would likely encounter much larger turnout for its local offices.

Introduction

Problem

The City of Minneapolis, Minnesota - like many other local jurisdictions in the United States - usually faces much lower voter turnout in its general municipal elections than it does in races for state or federal positions. In years when presidential elections occur, such as 2012 and 2016, turnout is near 80% of registered voters.[1] However, during odd-numbered years when races are held for Mayor, City Council, and the Park Board, turnout is often barely above 30%. Voter turnout is also much better in even-numbered years that do not have a presidential race (i.e. midterm elections). In 2014, about 55.6% of eligible voters in the city opted to cast a ballot.

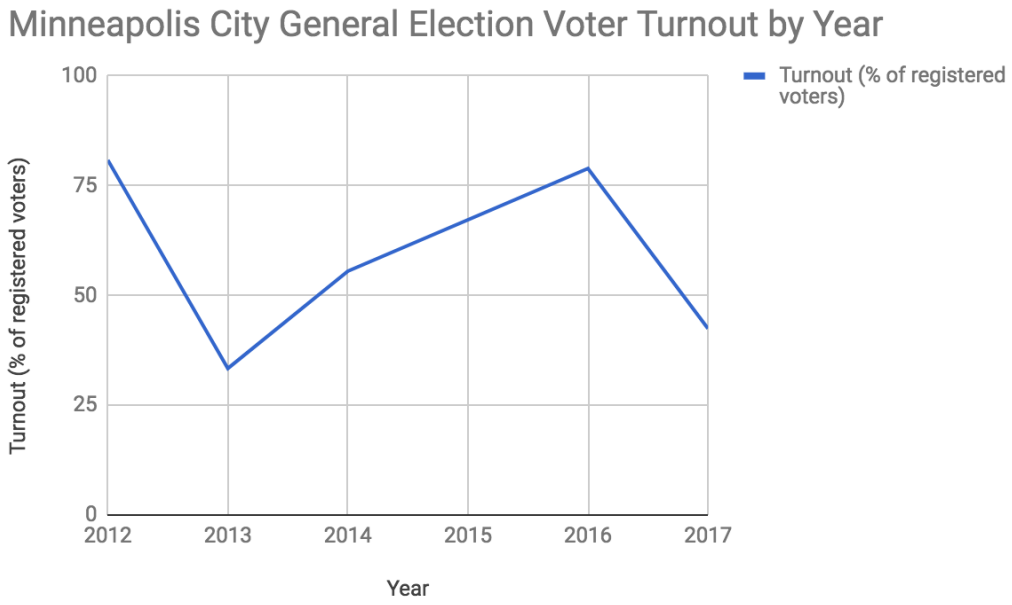
With fewer voters taking interest in these offices, there are definite concerns that government properly reflects its residents. Typically, only the most engaged citizens turn out to vote in municipal elections, and they are not necessarily representative of the wider population. In Minneapolis, voters who participate in odd-year elections tend to be older, be whiter, and more often own their own homes.[2]

One solution to the problem of lower turnout in these vital local elections is to merge them with general elections for state and federal offices. Many politicians and scholars around the United States believe such a policy is an effective solution because people tend to vote more when higher-profile candidates and referenda are on the ballot. Voters may be more incentivized to vote with more important races together. This report investigates what can be reasonably expected in terms of voter turnout if Minneapolis changes its municipal elections: those for Mayor, City Council, Park Board, and Board of Estimates. Such an analysis is based on the review of election results from 22 cities and counties from around the United States that are similar to Minneapolis. Finally, this report addresses potential concerns of changing the timing of elections, including financial, legal, and political considerations. Ultimately, it is determined that even-year elections would likely result in more voters making choices for local offices than in odd years.

Figure 1: Data from Minneapolis's Elections Department website.

[1] "Voter Turnout Information," *City of Minneapolis Elections Department*. http://vote.minneapolismn.gov/results/WCMS1P-126716.

[2] Peter Callaghan. "Odd years out? In both Minneapolis and St. Paul, new efforts seek to move municipal elections to even years," *Minn Post*. May 2, 2017. https://www.minnpost.com/politics-policy/2017/05/odd-years-out-both-minneapolis-and-st-paul-new-efforts-seek-move-municipal-e.



Background

Elections in the United States generally follow a common pattern. Presidential campaigns occur in even-numbered years divisible by four, congressional races and gubernatorial races for most states are held in even years including those that do not have a presidential election, and municipal and county races are often held in odd-numbered years. The practice of holding these elections in off-years dates back to the Progressive Era of American history (roughly the 1890s to 1920s), in which many local and state governments wanted to encourage the public to dedicate more attention to, and participation in, local politics.[3] At that time, many voters wanted to implement electoral reforms and wanted to disentangle local elections from more high-profile national politics.

As previously mentioned, most cities and towns in the United States follow a pattern similar to that of Minneapolis. Turnout is often lowest in years without a federal or state race. In common language, "top-ballot" issues and candidates (e.g. those running for president) often inspire more people to vote. Voter turnout is therefore often higher in years when there are races of national or statewide importance. Citizens then make decisions about candidates and referenda "down-ballot", and they often opt to not make a selection when voting. This often results in lower rates of voting for different races even within the same election.

Minneapolis is an example of what is known as a charter city in Minnesota. The City was given a charter by the state to have more independence than other cities in the state. It can pass its own

[3] Anders Lijphart. "Unequal Participation: Democracy's Unresolved Dilemma Presidential Address," American Political Science Association, 1996. *American Political Science Review*, 91(1), 1-14.

municipal laws and define its own political structures and institutions.[4] With this power, the Minneapolis Charter Commission can opt to put issues on the ballot in future elections as referenda. If it wanted to change the year of Minneapolis's municipal elections, the Commission could put the issue before voters to decide as a proposition to amend the City Charter. Minneapolis could then change the timing of its elections to coincide with other races without the input of the state legislature.

Elections in Even-Numbered Years Elsewhere

Recently, many American cities and states have considered moving elections to even-numbered years. The Kentucky state legislature introduced a bill to move their local elections to even years in February. Phoenix, Arizona's city council has put the issue of changing elections up for a vote during its elections in August of 2018. In Minnesota, the city of New Brighton has had a contentious debate over the issue but did try to move its elections to even years in 2016.

In 2015, California's Governor Jerry Brown signed into law a bill that would require cities and towns to move their elections to even-numbered years if voter turnout in municipal elections fell below a threshold of 25% of average turnout in the past four statewide elections.[5] As the law went into effect in January 2018, there is not much research or analysis into the law's impact on local elections. However, the intent of the law was clearly to increase turnout for key local races and to better help voters. After the law's passage, many California cities adopted measures to change their municipal elections to conform with the state law, including San Mateo, Long Beach, and Burbank.

In each of the cases mentioned above, lawmakers were concerned about falling voter turnout in elections, decreasing political engagement, and a lack of interest in regional politics. If it succeeds in changing the years when local races are held, Minneapolis would be joining a rising movement to further improve turnout.

Analysis

Methodology

In order to effectively determine what local turnout would be in a midterm election year in Minneapolis, I created a sample of cities to serve as a comparison. For this sample, I relied on data from the general election in November 2014. As this was the most recent midterm year, it was easier to assume that conditions would not have changed greatly enough to affect turnout.

It is important to note that I created this sample without certain standard statistical processes. Because there are thousands of cities and towns in the United States, it was more effective to

[4] "Charter and City Ordinances". *City of Minneapolis*. http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/government/ord/index.htm.
[5] "Senate Bill 415: Voter Participation," *California Legislative Information*. California State Legislature. 2015. https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160SB415.

purposefully select cities that would be comparable to Minneapolis. I did so in two distinct ways: 1) I selected major cities with populations between 300,000 and 750,000 residents, and 2) cities in the Midwest region of the United States. The major cities would be comparable to Minneapolis in terms of population, size, and demographics. For the smaller cities in the Midwest I used, these tended to be larger communities that had diverse populations, a history of progressive politics, and colleges and universities.

The methodology I used is certainly not without potential sources of bias. Because I manually chose my sample, there could be a variety of factors that influence voter turnout that have nothing to do with criteria I used. Regional culture, state politics, percent of non-English speakers, political polarization, and many more factors could have affected the data. It is common practice to use randomization to reduce the influence of such factors, but true randomization would have created a sample with many smaller communities. If I had used other randomization techniques, such as taking a random sample of cities of similar size, I would have been left with a sample that would be much too small.

After selecting an appropriate sample, I collected voter turnout data from either city or county election websites.[6] In every case, there was election data available for public use. If a city did not manage its own elections, I used data from the whole county as a stand-in for the city itself. This was the case for Portland, OR (Multnomah County) and others. In a select few cases, the city and county were one in the same, such as with Denver, CO.

The cities and counties within my sample had an immense variety of offices and propositions, which made it difficult to truly compare everyone on the exact same criteria. Because the main focus of my research was to determine if turnout would drop for local offices compared to statewide or national ones, I typically chose the turnout for governor because most states decide their governors in midterm elections. In case there was no governor's race, I chose results for US Senate races and called that out when recording data. I then found returns for a local race that would apply to the entire locality but not apply to anywhere else in a state. Most often I tried to find results for mayoral races. If the city did not have a mayoral election in 2014 (or if I was using a county instead of a city proper), I used the results for a district attorney, judge, sheriff, or other local race, depending on what was most easily available.

A key conjecture of my analysis is that the local races are roughly equivalent in terms of their importance to the public. I make the assumption that the average voter would be just as likely to make a choice for mayor as they would for a sheriff. In reality, that may certainly not be the case. The public's interest in a non-contested race for a judgeship could be different than its interest for district attorney. However, because so much variation exists among positions that were

[6] All data comes from the elections department websites and is publicly available. For example in Boston, MA for the 2014 elections, results are found at https://www.boston.gov/departments/elections/results#results-2014.

running at any given time in differently sized cities and counties, it made the most sense to treat all of these example local races equally for the sake of estimating turnout drop-off down-ballot.

In one particular case, there was no data on turnout governor or senator in November 2014. This occurred in Washington, DC, which is not a state and does not have representation in Congress. I decided to still use the results for Washington's mayoral election because I thought the turnout for mayor there could inform what Minneapolis might expect if it switches municipal elections to occur in midterm years. Instead of using data on a gubernatorial or senate race, I instead used the race for DC's non-voting delegate to Congress. I discuss Washington, DC in greater detail further in this report.

I typically did my own calculations for what actual turnout was for specific offices. Most election websites had lists of registered voters separate from election returns. I then often manually counted the total number of people who voted for a governor/US senator and the total number of people who voted for the local race I chose for the given community. I then used those numbers divided by the total population of registered voters in the locality to determine the turnout percentage for each type of office. For a final means of comparison, I subtracted the turnouts for the local races from the statewide ones and used those numbers for further analysis for estimating turnout in Minneapolis.

Cities and Counties

To conduct my research, I evaluated the data from the following cities and counties. I list them below and include in parentheses the major city within the county, if applicable. The data is presented in table form in Appendix A at the end of the report.

Baltimore, MD
Boston, MA
Cuyahoga County, OH (Cleveland)
Dane County, WI (Madison)
Denver, CO
Douglas County, NE (Omaha)
El Paso County, TX
Fresno County, CA
Fulton County, GA (Atlanta)
Kansas City, MO
King County, WA (Seattle)
Lancaster County, NE (Lincoln)
Marion County, IN (Indianapolis)
Miami-Dade County, FL
Milwaukee, WI

Multnomah County, OR (Portland)
Oakland, CA
Polk County, IA (Des Moines)
Sacramento County, CA
Tulsa County, OK (Tulsa)
Wake County, NC (Raleigh)
Washington, DC

As mentioned, a subset of these localities are located in the Midwest and are considered separately. These cities and counties are:

Cuyahoga County, OH (Cleveland)
Dane County, WI (Madison)
Douglas County, NE (Omaha)
Lancaster County, NE (Lincoln)
Marion County, IN (Indianapolis)
Milwaukee, WI
Polk County, IA (Des Moines)

Voter Turnout Overall

Based on the data collected and the assumptions I've outlined above, the difference between the turnout percentage at the top of the ticket (i.e. presidential or gubernatorial races) and those on the bottom is on average 8.31 points.

If one extrapolates using this data and maintaining the assumptions I have outlined above, one might expect the percent of Minneapolis voters choosing a mayor to be about 8.31 points lower than the percent of Minneapolis voters choosing a president or governor. Seeing as nearly 80% of voters usually participate in presidential elections and about 55.5% participate in midterm elections, one could expect on average for the number of voters selecting municipal politicians to be higher with a change to even-numbered years.

Voter Turnout in Midterms vs. Presidential Years

There are noticeable differences between presidential years and midterm years in how voters make decisions for down-ballot races. From my sample in 2016, the difference in number of voters choosing a president versus those choosing candidates/propositions for local elections was about 9.49 points. In 2014, the average was about 7.13. The ranges are also considerably different. In 2016, the difference between participation for a national race and a local one could be between close to zero, like in Sacramento County, or nearly 32 points, like in Multnomah County. In 2014 the range was smaller, with a difference of just a handful of votes in Washington, DC and nearly 20 percentage points in Denver, CO.

Based on this data, the Minneapolis Charter Commission and city government may wish to consider which even-numbered years to conduct elections. Drop-off in votes appears to be larger in presidential election years and has more variability. However, choosing presidential election years might still yield a higher net turnout for local races because of the sheer number of Minneapolis voters that participate in those elections.

Voter Turnout by Mayoral Races

Perhaps most important to consider for Minneapolis would be just those data points that involve mayoral elections. If one relaxes the assumption that all local races are equal and just considers the points with mayoral elections, there is a striking change in turnout. Among this dataset, Baltimore, Washington, DC, and Oakland each had a major election in the same year as a mayoral race. In each of those, the percentage point difference in participation for the top of the ticket and the mayor position was about two or less. This implies that voters may value mayors more than other local races and may have more interest in those than others, such as for sheriffs or judgeships.

However, it is important to note that there are only three data points from my analysis that contain mayoral elections. With such a low sample size, there is a decent chance that a real turnout for Minneapolis mayor might be much lower. Additionally, with a small sample size there is no guarantee that the cities are truly representative. There might be other characteristics of these cities that cause the lower average drop in turnout that cannot be limited when averages are taken from a larger sample.

Voter Turnout Among Midwest Cities and Counties

Cities within the Midwest as a region might have similar voting tendencies. The average difference in turnout for cities and counties within the Midwest region is about 6.96 percentage points. This is lower than the average for the entire sample and lower than the averages factoring presidential and midterm years. However, it is still higher than the sample of just mayoral races.

As Minneapolis is a major hub of the Midwest and shares cultural, historical, economic, and demographic features similar to those in the region, this average may prove a more accurate indicator for how much voter turnout drop-off to expect. These cities share many things in common, from relatively similar geographic features to reliance on local agricultural regions.

However, it is important to note that Minneapolis may have features that are very different than other Midwestern towns and cities. In this sample, Minneapolis is also much larger by population than the other Midwest cities, with the exception of Milwaukee. Additionally, Minneapolis has a very diverse population and many companies that might be dissimilar from the other municipalities, such as professional sports, major banks, and a high number of theaters per

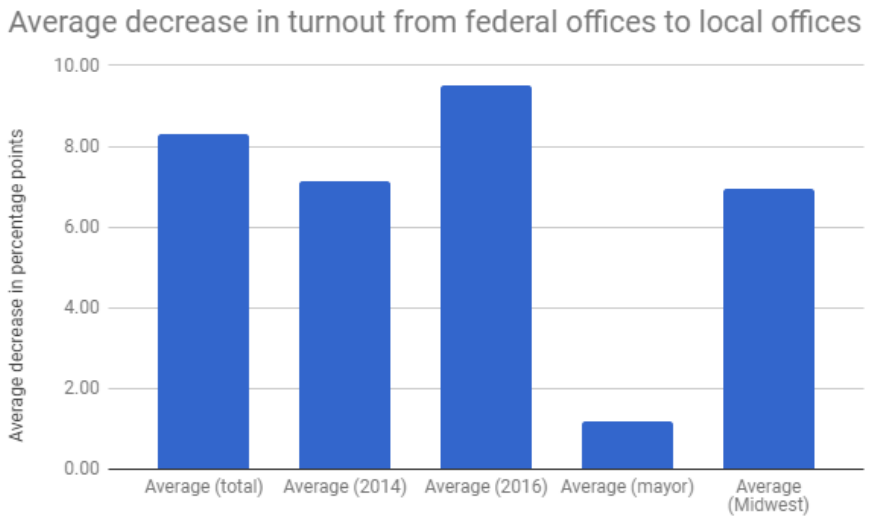
capita.[7] Because of these differences, this subset might be the most subject to potential biases and thus inaccuracies for comparison.

Additionally, this subset includes more counties than others. As previously mentioned, one can assume that counties would vote in similar ways to the cities within them, but realistically that is not the case. The demographic makeup of cities (e.g. the college towns of Madison, WI or Lincoln, NE) can be very different than suburbs or exurbs in the overall county.

Summary of Analysis

In each of the above scenarios, average voter turnout declines only by single digits in terms of percentage points from the top of the ballot to lower races on the ballot. This is significant for Minneapolis because overall it does appear that moving elections to even years would allow for increased voter turnout for local races. Given that voter turnout in 2017 was about 42% and turnout was about 55.6% in 2014, we could still realistically expect more people to participate. These turnout numbers are also in percentages of registered voters who actually voted. The net number of voters who participate in local elections might also be greater in even years than odd, but that consideration is not fully addressed in this report.

Figure 2: Summary bar chart of average decreases from analysis. Data comes from respective elections offices.



Other Considerations

Changing the timing of elections does appear to have an effect on turnout, though policymakers may wish to consider other implications of moving municipal races to even-numbered years. These considerations are many and have varied levels of research behind them. Ultimately, tradeoffs must be weighed and accepted if a change to when elections occur is to be adopted.

[7] Mary Katherine Fiala. "Twin Cities' theater scene is second to none." *Minneapolis Star Tribune*. February 4, 2016. http://www.startribune.com/twin-cities-theater-scene-is-second-to-none/367747031/.

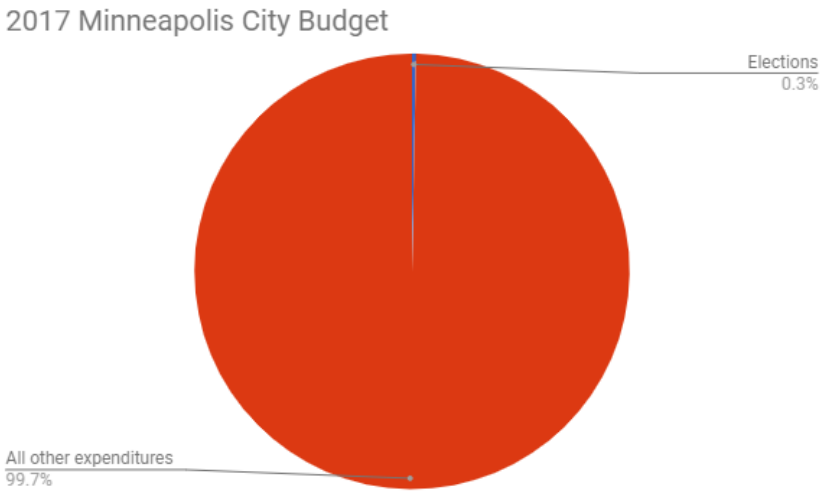
Financial

The City of Minneapolis currently conducts elections in three out of every four years. For example, in 2016 it held elections during a presidential year, in 2017 it held a vote for municipal offices, and in 2018 it will hold elections related to federal midterms, state, and county offices. By changing when municipal elections are held, Minneapolis can merge its municipal races with others and avoid some costs associated with an election year.

In 2017, the Minneapolis City Council approved an overall budget of $497.8 million. Of that, the Council allocated $6.3 million towards the City Clerk's Office, which oversees the Elections Department.[8] Once broken down, the highest share of expenses went to wages and salaries (42%), of which 6 full-time employees work in the Elections Department. Overall operating costs and contractual obligations for this Office were about $2.7 million, but the Election's Department's were only about half of that. Total discretionary spending for elections was therefore close to $1.4 million in 2017. Those costs included renting spaces for polling places, printing ballots, and voter outreach.

Generously assuming that all of the operating costs and contractual obligations from the Elections Department could be saved, only about $1.4 million in costs per four-year cycle (in 2017 dollars) could be cut by merging municipal elections with those in presidential or midterm years. From a fiscal standpoint, the City of Minneapolis would possibly save 0.5% of its budget from one year out of every four by switching the timing of elections. This is a relatively small sum and not a key reason for merging municipal races with others.

Figure 3: Breakdown of Minneapolis City Government budget. Data from Minneapolis City Budget.



[8] "2017 Council Adopted Budget", City of Minneapolis, MN. December 2016. http://minneapolismn.gov/www/groups/public/@finance/documents/webcontent/wcmsp-194445.pdf.

Though savings would be small, some of that money could be used to fund investments in capital and equipment for the Elections Department. The City could update its ballot counting machines, streamline its voter registration processes, hire interns, or conduct field research projects.

Legal

Under Minnesota state statutes, it is legal for Minneapolis to change its municipal elections to an even-numbered year.

> "Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary and subject to the provisions of this section, the governing body of a city may… decide to hold the election on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November in either an even- or odd-numbered year. A city may hold elections in either the even-numbered year or the odd-numbered year, but not both. When a city changes its elections from one year to another, and does not provide for the expiration of terms by ordinance, the term of an incumbent expiring at a time when no municipal election is held in the months immediately prior to expiration is extended until the date for taking office following the next scheduled municipal election."[9]

The biggest complication would be to reassign terms to the mayor, City Council members, and other elected city officials. Under the state law, terms would be extended to be until the next municipal election, but the City of Minneapolis could pass its own legislation allowing for some terms to be shorter, if such a proposal better eases the transition to an even-numbered year.[10] Any proposal to change the year of municipal elections will need to have considerations for how best to change the terms of current politicians.

Minneapolis is unique among most cities in that it uses ranked choice voting (RCV) to determine its local elected officials. Voters choose their first, second, and third choices for a given office, and the city's elections department holds rounds of votings that help to ultimately determine the winner. Regardless of the challenges of designing a ballot, it does seem that Minneapolis has the authority to combine its RCV method for municipal offices with traditional counting. According to state statutes, local governments "shall determine the voting method in combined local elections when other election jurisdictions located wholly or partially within the municipality schedule elections on the same date as the regular municipal primary or general election."[11] In other words, local governments like Minneapolis may decide how to best conduct their elections

[9] "2017 Minnesota Statutes," *Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes*. Ch. 205, section 7, subdivision 1. https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=205.07.
[10] Ibid.
[11] "2017 Minnesota Statutes," *Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes*. Ch. 204B, section 35, subdivision 5. https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=204B.35.

alongside state and federal. This typically applies to how best create precincts and design ballots for a variety of races, but it could apply to the RCV issue as well.

Political

Moving municipal elections to either presidential or midterm election years will decidedly impact the political environment, but exactly how is difficult to determine. With greater turnout, candidates for City offices would need to change their strategies and messaging to appeal to voters who are also focused on national and state elections. Some candidates will likely lose to incumbents as different groups of people turn out to vote, which will thus change the tone of city politics. However, little research exists on what such changes can generally be expected.It is not clear how such a change might affect the tone and content of political races, but some preliminary research indicates that when municipal elections are merged with more high-profile races, progressive voters tend to turn out in slightly higher numbers.[12] However, this research only includes data from four states and does not describe in depth the methodology used to describe what is considered liberal or conservative.

During municipal election years, mayoral, city council, park board, and others' races benefit from generally not having to compete with statewide and federal candidates. If elections were to change to different years, local races would likely face less publicity from the media. However, it is not clear how such a move might affect voters' attention in these races. Due to a lack of publicity, voters might overall care less about local races since they are unaware of candidates or issues. On the other hand, voters may be more concerned about local elections in even years because they are more engaged overall due to the races at the top of the ballot. Current research is limited in this area, though researchers in California found that some citizens who cast votes for local offices in even years may be less informed about local politics.[13]

Moving elections to different years may have an impact on campaign finance. In 2017, mayoral candidates' campaigns received around $1.8 million from donors[14], but there is no evidence that that same amount of support might come into future mayoral races. During midterm and presidential years, many voters may donate to multiple other campaigns and give local candidates less overall support.

---

[12] Vladimir Kogan, Stéphane Lavertu and Zachary Peskowitz. "Do low-turnout elections make the electorate more conservative? Not that much." *The Washington Post*. February 20, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/02/20/do-low-turnout-elections-make-the-electorate-more-conservative-not-that-much/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.88fe3ea1963a.

[13] Zoltan L. Hajnal, et al. *Municipal Elections in California:Turnout, Timing, and Competition*. (San Francisco, CA: Public Policy Institute of California, 2002).

[14] Adam Belz and Emma Nelson. "More than $1.8 million pours into Minneapolis mayoral race," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*. November 1, 2017. http://www.startribune.com/more-than-1-8-million-pours-into-minneapolis-mayoral-race/454364243/

An additional challenge is the technology that is available for counting ballots with Ranked Choice Voting (RCV). As of May 2018, ballot counting machines do not exist that can both tabulate regular voting methods and RCV at the same time. This could cause complications for city officials, who would need to devise a system in which they could count ballots using machines for traditional voting and then either use different machines or a manual count for another part of the ballot. Such a system could extend the time it takes to finish determining winners in an election, as more time would be needed to count the ballots. Additionally, the City will need to consider hiring personnel or acquiring more machines for this type of voting.

Examples of Specific Cities

Oakland, California

The City of Oakland provides a great comparison for Minneapolis for what to expect in moving elections to even-numbered years. Oakland currently hosts its municipal elections in midterm years and most recently held elections in November 2014 alongside state and federal races. Turnout in midterm years in Oakland usually hovers around 40-50%, and in 2014 about 49% of registered voters went to the polls and made a choice for California governor. About 47% of eligible voters then selected their choices for mayor, making only two percentage point drop in turnout for a key local race.

Oakland, California is demographically and culturally similar to Minneapolis. According to the US Census, the city has population of about 420,000 compared to Minneapolis's 414,000.[15] Oakland and Minneapolis also share similar legacies of progressive activism, with unions and civil societies historically being very important. Oakland is famously the birthplace of the Black Panther Movement, and Minneapolis is home to such famous progressive politicians such as Hubert H. Humphrey.Both cities also have similar industrial and manufacturing economies while at the same time being part of larger metropolitan regions.

Another important similarity is Oakland's use of ranked choice voting (RCV). Oakland and Minneapolis are among a select few cities that use RCV for all municipal offices. Both cities also saw increased overall voter turnout with the introduction of their RCV programs, which would seem to indicate that the cities share similar election values and engagement in the voting process.

Washington, District of Columbia

The City of Washington, DC can also provide a useful comparison for Minneapolis when determining what turnout might be for local elections in even years. Like Oakland, Washington hosts its municipal elections in midterm years. In 2014, voter turnout in the city was a little over

[15] "Quick Facts", *US Census Bureau*. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/washingtoncitydistrictofcolumbia,minneapoliscityminnesota,oaklandcitycalifornia/PST045216.

38%, and the difference in turnout for the city's mayor versus the top of the ballot office was only a few hundred votes. In other words, the decrease was less than a thousandth of a percentage point. However, it is important to note that Washington does not have a governor nor representation in Congress. The office at the top of the ballot is a non-voting representative to the Congress.

Washington, DC is similar to Minneapolis also in terms of demographics and culture. Though Washington has nearly 200,000 more residents, both cities have some of the highest average levels of education per person in the country.[16] Additionally, Washington also has a history of progressive activism and politics, as it has voted for a Democratic president in every election for decades. Finally, both cities have relatively high rates of foreign-born residents, at 14% and 15% respectively.

As mentioned, Washington does not have a governor or federal races, but it still offers a great comparison because of how engaged its citizens are for local elections. Voters turned out in the 2014 midterm year with really no major top-of-the-ballot race at 38.5%, which was only slightly lower than Minneapolis's 2017 municipal election turnout of 42.5%. In fact, Washington has comparable turnout rates in presidential election years to Minneapolis, with both above 65% in 2016. With such lock-step similarities, it would be likely that Minneapolis would see very marginal drops in municipal voting if it were to change its timing of elections to be in even years.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of 22 cities and counties across the country, it appears that when municipal races are held in even-numbered years to coincide with federal and state elections citizens tend to vote less for local offices. However, the drop in percentage point turnout for those races compared to federal or state ones is on average only in the single digits.

Based on the analysis in this report, Minneapolis likely could expect to see greater voter participation in its mayoral, council, and park board races if they are held during midterm or presidential election years. In 2014, voter turnout in the City was about 55.5%, and in 2016 turnout was about 78.9% of registered voters. Assuming that Minneapolis has the average drop in voting for local races of about 8 percentage points, turnout would still be higher in midterm and presidential years than it was in 2017, which was 42.5%. However, when looking at only mayoral races or looking only at localities in the Midwest, one could expect even higher turnout for local races.

Before Minneapolis can change when it holds its municipal elections, policymakers should still consider other potential impacts. From a public finance standpoint, moving elections can merge

[16] Ibid. *US Census*.

together state and federal races with local ones and negate the need for the City to spend money on election judges, renting polling places, printing ballots, and more in one out of every four years. Though ultimately the savings would be small, the Elections and Voter Services department could use those funds to further invest in its operations. Additionally, policymakers must take into account legal and political ramifications of election changes. The City will need to analyze how state laws affect the change, including ballot design and altering current politicians' term limits. Finally, moving elections may change the character of local politics, as more voices participate and less attention is given to local offices in favor of more high-profile ones.

Increasing voter turnout for local races provides a number of benefits to Minneapolis as a whole. More voters engaged with local elections can drive up confidence in elected officials and inspire more people to find other ways of being active in their communities. Additionally, changing the timing of these municipal elections does seem to bring a greater variety of voices into politics. Precincts in Minneapolis that have higher concentrations of people of color, students, non-English speakers and other historically marginalized groups tend to participate less in odd-year elections, but those same areas can have swings of up to 20 percentage points in presidential election years.[17] From an equity standpoint, the simple step of changing when elections are held can include a greater diversity of the city's residents. With more people participating, the City's government can be more reflective of its residents and their views.

[17] See Minneapolis's election maps at http://vote.minneapolismn.gov/resources/ELECTION-MAPS.

Appendix A

City/County	Year of Election	# of Registered Voters	Turnout for Governor/Senator/President	Turnout Percent (Top)	Turnout for Mayor (or other local office)	Turnout Percent (Bottom)	Difference	Local Office
Baltimore, MD	2014	373,169	140,686	37.70	115,675	31.00	6.70	District Judge
Baltimore, MD	2016	389,335	239,454	61.50	234,055	60.12	1.39	Mayor
Boston, MA	2014	383,702	158,840	41.40	131,212	34.20	7.20	Sheriff
Boston, MA	2016	415,536	274,429	66.04	210,101	50.56	15.48	Sheriff
Cuyahoga County, OH (Cleveland)	2014	886,098	336,769	38.01	330,185	37.26	0.74	County Executive
Cuyahoga County, OH (Cleveland)	2016	891,568	608,879	68.29	368,288	41.31	26.99	County Attorney
Dane County, WI (Madison)	2014	347,158	252,467	72.72	246,498	71.00	1.72	Propositions
Dane County, WI (Madison)	2016	378,210	309,291	81.78	262,802	69.49	12.29	County Clerk
Denver, CO	2014	365,343	232,195	63.56	149,513	40.92	22.63	County Judge
Denver, CO	2016	412,174	331,870	80.52	284,573	69.04	11.48	District Attorney
Douglas County, NE (Omaha)	2014	324,560	144,536	44.53	138,064	42.54	1.99	County Attorney
Douglas County, NE (Omaha)	2016	349,816	240,433	68.73	184,104	52.63	16.10	County Clerk
El Paso County, TX	2014	404,580	80,408	19.87	54,206	13.40	6.48	County Judge
El Paso County, TX	2016	427,850	215,922	50.47	207,773	48.56	1.90	Sheriff
Fresno County, CA	2014	416,433	159,887	38.39	141,738	34.04	4.36	Superintendent

Fresno County, CA	2016	437,667	287,062	65.59	275,703	62.99	2.60	Propositions
Fulton County, GA (Atlanta)	2014	561,266	265,796	47.36	204,001	36.35	11.01	Other
Fulton County, GA (Atlanta)	2016	590,362	438,751	74.32	413,918	70.11	4.21	Sheriff
Kansas City, MO	2014	215,357	55,476	25.76	54,407	25.26	0.50	County Executive
Kansas City, MO	2016	223,143	129,893	58.21	119,432	53.52	4.69	County Executive
King County, WA (Seattle)	2014	1,181,076	631,020	53.43	410,733	34.78	18.65	County Attorney
King County, WA (Seattle)	2016	1,288,327	1,028,450	79.83	786,419	61.04	18.79	County Judge
Lancaster County, NE (Lincoln)	2014	182,300	86,083	47.22	66,453	36.45	10.77	Sheriff
Lancaster County, NE (Lincoln)	2016	189,380	136,223	71.93	133,402	70.44	1.49	Propositions
Marion County, IN (Indianapolis)	2014	650,472	158,757	24.41	157,796	24.26	0.15	Sheriff
Marion County, IN (Indianapolis)	2016	715,154	366,791	51.29	353,657	49.45	1.84	County Treasurer
Miami-Dade County, FL	2014	1,299,342	521,444	40.13	431,849	33.24	6.90	County Judge
Miami-Dade County, FL	2016	1,379,248	987,191	71.57	851,796	61.76	9.82	County Mayor
Milwaukee, WI	2014	317,431	205,328	64.68	186,816	58.85	5.83	Sheriff
Milwaukee, WI	2016	328,294	246,445	75.07	191,712	58.40	16.67	District Attorney
Multnomah County, OR (Portland)	2014	441,157	289,754	65.68	252,221	57.17	8.51	Propositions

Multnomah County, OR (Portland)	2016	505,145	399,103	79.01	235,913	46.70	32.31	Sheriff
Oakland, CA	2014	221,073	109,518	49.54	104,834	47.42	2.12	Mayor
Oakland, CA	2016	248,124	177,687	71.61	128,029	51.60	20.01	District Attorney
Polk County, IA (Des Moines)	2014	284,975	164,258	57.64	112,286	39.40	18.24	County Attorney
Polk County, IA (Des Moines)	2016	303,299	231,555	76.35	222,841	73.47	2.87	County Sheriff
Sacramento County, CA	2014	683,632	324,876	47.52	216,658	31.69	15.83	County Judge
Sacramento County, CA	2016	772,865	575,711	74.49	572,554	74.08	0.41	Propositions
Tulsa County, OK (Tulsa)	2014	326,350	131,649	40.34	113,740	34.85	5.49	District Judge
Tulsa County, OK (Tulsa)	2016	324,397	247,054	76.16	243,802	75.16	1.00	Sheriff
Wake County, NC (Raleigh)	2014	670,801	326,426	48.66	318,888	47.54	1.12	Sheriff
Wake County, NC (Raleigh)	2016	705,228	527,624	74.82	498,774	70.73	4.09	County Judge
Washington, DC	2014	461,325	177,377	38.45	177,358	38.45	0.00	Mayor
Washington, DC	2016	478,688	312,575	65.30	301,077	62.90	2.40	Other